

VZCZCXRO0844
RR RUEHBZ RUEHJO RUEHMR RUEHRN
DE RUEH DU #0011/01 0201529
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 201529Z JAN 09
FM AMCONSUL DURBAN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1388
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEH DU/AMCONSUL DURBAN 0761

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 DURBAN 000011

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

FOR AF/S

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SF](#)

SUBJECT: DA LEADERS CONFIDENT OF SUCCESS DESPITE HURDLES AT NATIONAL
AND LOCAL LEVELS

REF: 08 CAPE TOWN 238; 08 PRETORIA 2196

DURBAN 00000011 001.3 OF 002

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Senior Democratic Alliance (DA) leaders are interested to see how the newly formed Congress of the People (COPE) performs in the next election, but are unconvinced the party will threaten the DA's own prospects at the polls. Senior KwaZulu Natal DA representatives related that DA campaign goals -- winning the Western Cape and keeping the African National Congress (ANC) from obtaining a two-thirds majority in the national legislature -- remain unchanged from last year. There are few signs the DA has been significantly hurt by the formation of COPE in KwaZulu Natal or nationally, but the party may be hindered in the short term by the departure of several senior members. End Summary.

"What Do You Make of COPE?"

¶2. (SBU) DA Deputy Chief Whip Mike Ellis, parliamentarian Gareth Morgan, KwaZulu Natal Provincial Director Penny Tainton, and Msunduzi councilor Sizwe Wiseman met with the Consul General and visiting Pretoria Poloff on January 16. They began the meeting by asking if they could gain a sense from U.S. diplomats of their view of COPE before launching into their own observations about the new party. Ellis related, "We will be fascinated by how well COPE will do." Speaking about COPE on the national level, he characterized the formation of COPE as more dangerous to the ANC than to his own party and said that the "ANC is rattled, even more so by the [Supreme Court of Appeal] court ruling on Monday." The delegation assessed COPE would hurt support for the ANC, but contended the new party lacks a strong campaign message and there remain questions about how effective COPE President Mosiuoa Lekota can be as a leader. Ellis claimed the DA is unconcerned about COPE Deputy Secretary General, and KwaZulu Natal native, Deirdre Carter. He quipped, "We do not even know who she is." (Note: Many political analysts and pundits claim COPE chose Carter to appeal to the white, liberal voters who favor the DA. End Note.) Ellis did say, however, that the DA "sees COPE as an ally."

Continuity in DA National Strategy Despite Re-Branding

¶3. (SBU) Ellis and Morgan concurred that the DA's election strategy -- winning Western Cape and keeping the ANC from gaining a two-thirds majority in the National Assembly -- remained the same from last year before COPE was formed and before Zille re-branded the party. The delegation said that it would campaign vigorously through television advertisements and market itself as the "trusted hand in coalition building" because working with other parties is the future of South African politics. Morgan also noted that this campaign would

"really be about Helen Zille." The Consul General then asked if the campaign was not also about the strength of some local DA leaders. In replying, Morgan backtracked, but only slightly, and noted that Zille would be crucial to success. (Note: Morgan's response showed that the party's characterization of the campaign is somewhat contradictory because most pundits and political analysts see the election as also being about whether the party's efforts to restructure and bring in new voters -- non-white voters -- have been successful. End Note.) He related that the DA would primarily campaign nationally in black areas and there would not be many images of Zille campaigning in white areas. However, Morgan said that in the end the DA is really hoping that it will be in position to change voters' minds right before they go to the polls. The delegation agreed that "we must show that we care."

DA Has Realistic Expectations in KZN

14. (SBU) DA leaders primarily spoke to how poorly other parties will perform and admitted their own weaknesses in the province. The delegation's strategy for the province appears to be promoting Zille to attract new voters across racial lines based on her track record of performance in Cape Town. However, attracting non-white voters remains difficult and the best they could say about their party's chances in KZN was when Ellis related that the DA has restructured and that "this province was a leader in restructuring." Morgan followed by saying that "you can only project voting totals when you can project voter turnout." He said that the DA would turn out its voters better than any other party in the province. (Note: In the November 2008 election registration drive, the DA was successful in signing up many new potential voters in KZN's South Coast region. End Note.) Morgan projected the DA expects to get more voters absolutely, but noted that a great deal will hinge on the resulting proportions that emerge from actual voter turnout and on how well other parties campaign. (Comment: The delegation, in contrast with other political parties, did not

DURBAN 00000011 002.3 OF 002

throw out numerical projections when they lacked a good grasp on their prospects in the province. Other parties have made explicit projections for their results in the province, often based on dubious polling from hired firms or their own assumptions. The DA representatives volunteered that two polls they commissioned from reputable entities produced contradictory results; this perhaps explains their lack of certainty. End Comment.)

15. (SBU) Turning to how other parties will perform, the delegation assessed the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) is losing ground in the province. They said that money is a problem for the IFP since they no longer have access to the government's patronage network. Ellis and Morgan thought that Prince Mangosuthu Buthelezi's remarks in 2007 that he would step down hurt the party because "everyone knew there was no clear successor in place." The delegation agreed that the IFP's selection of national chairperson Zanele Magwaza-Msibi as the party's premier candidate is a risk because she is "unknown and disrespectful." Ellis said that COPE is not as strong in the province like elsewhere, but he hopes that COPE and the IFP will do well to weaken the ANC. He noted that Zuma has wide support in the province, but that "many question his personality."

16. (SBU) Morgan related one of the DA's biggest weaknesses in the province has been their inability to tap into the Indian vote. He said there are voters -- particularly within Amichand Rajbansi's Minority Front -- that will always be closed to the DA. Ellis added, "The Indian community is a difficult community to read for the future."

Loss of Senior Leaders Unsettling in the Short Term

17. (SBU) The loss of Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly Sandra Botha, former DA Chief Whip Douglas Gibson, and parliamentarian Sheila Camerer to foreign ambassadorial positions presents an immediate challenge to the DA in the

months ahead. Some DA members were incensed by decisions taken by Gibson and Camerer to seek positions overseas, although Ellis explained that the moves by Gibson and Camerer were more palatable because "they were due to retire anyway." Ellis said, "Quite frankly there are a lot of us in the DA that were [ticked] off that Botha decided to leave." He added, "Botha would not have been re-elected anyway, but the departure still does not look good." He related that what angered most within the party about her decision is that it was clear she made the move after negotiating "behind our backs." Morgan sought to turn the departures into a good news story for the DA, saying that the moves give room to new, younger members of the party for the future. Ellis agreed, saying that the "new blood" would be good for the party over the long term because so many members have been around for so long.

Comment

18. (SBU) Like most opposition parties, the DA is hoping that COPE does not eat into its support base. Their senior leadership seems unconvinced the party will threaten its own prospects and the party's goals of winning the Western Cape and keeping the ANC from reaching a two-thirds majority appear as attainable as ever. The major hurdle to attain their goals is quickly promoting new leaders to offset the departures of some senior stalwarts; this should be taken care of after the list process is complete. The story for DA success in KwaZulu Natal, however, is much different. The delegation's remarks suggest that the party's best hope may be for the DA to turn out its supporters and hope the ANC fails to win an absolute majority so it can be part of a ruling coalition after the election. The DA recognizes that it has not yet made inroads into the Indian community and they do not appear to be winning over disgruntled ANC members. In the end, the best they may be able to hope for here is that their willingness, and ability, to work in coalitions can serve them well here if they, the IFP, and COPE can weaken the ANC's control of the province.

DERDERIAN